



CAPTivations

Success Stories in Prevention

November 2002



CAPTivations is a publication of CSAP's Southwest Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies (CAPT) funded by cooperative agreement with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention.

Janette Cline
Acting Director
Kansas State Liaison

LaDonna Coy
Acting Associate Director
Coordinator, Technology &
Product Development

Karen Abrams
Nebraska State Liaison

Catherine Calhoun
Staff Assistant

Johnette Ellis
Financial Administrator

Sandy Fisher
Operations Manager

Adelina Howard
Financial Assistant

Suzanne Hughes
Missouri State Liaison

Kristina Kie
New Mexico State Liaison

Joanie Liebman
Colorado State Liaison

Bonny Million
Communications Specialist

Theresa Parks
Financial Assistant

Katherine Price
Staff Assistant

Brenda Powell
Product Development Associate

Debbie Rector Johnson
Oklahoma State Liaison

Carl Shackelford
Arkansas State Liaison

Julie Stevens
Texas State Liaison

Monique Thomas
Louisiana State Liaison

CSAP's Southwest CAPT is administered by the Southwest Prevention Center at the University of Oklahoma's College of Continuing Education. This document is printed at no cost to the taxpayers of the State of Oklahoma.

Commerce-Picher-Cardin Coalition (OK)

People in the far northeast Oklahoma towns of Commerce, Picher, and Cardin have a new weapon against methamphetamine dealers: a postcard they can send anonymously to the local drug task force detailing possible illegal drug activity in their neighborhood.

This program, sponsored since the fall of 2001 by the Commerce-Picher-Cardin Coalition, has helped the task force close down four meth labs in Ottawa County in a year, said Nancy Niehaus, executive director of the coalition.

"This came about from a lot of people representing different areas of the community—law enforcement, churches, parents—working together on coming up with ways to address the problem," Niehaus said. "We're the only one in the state that we know of that is doing this."

These three communities have identified meth as one of its biggest drug problems, but drugs are not the only problems the people there face. Cardin, Picher, and Commerce, once the home of extensive lead and zinc mining, now sit in the middle of the Tar Creek Superfund site. The old mines, which cover 400 square miles in northeast Oklahoma, southeast Kansas, and southwest Missouri, are now flooded with highly acidic water, which is now beginning to poison the water supply. The towns are also surrounded by huge piles of "chat," or leftover gravel from the mines, which have traces of lead and zinc. The dust from the chat gets into the lungs; from there the lead gets into the bloodstream.

According to a federal Environmental Protection Agency Superfund website, 25 percent of the children living in the five-city mining area have elevated levels of lead in their blood. This, Niehaus said, has an effect on both learning and behavior.

People stay in the area, Niehaus said, because of tradition and family ties, as well as economics—it's inexpensive to live there. Many people work in nearby Miami, home to Northeastern Oklahoma A&M, Newell Coach Motor Homes, and a mushroom farm that has attracted a number of Hispanics to the area. Others work in Kansas, just two blocks away or in Joplin, Missouri, only 15 miles away.

The roots of the Commerce-Picher-Cardin Coalition began in 1991 with a county-wide Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) five-year grant which focused primarily

on the schools. Niehaus, who at the time worked with the grant and Bill Kahler, through the Northeast Area Prevention Resource Center, decided to apply for funding for a smaller coalition. With the help of over 50 people in the communities of Commerce, Picher, and Cardin, the coalition developed plans to promote healthier behaviors in their

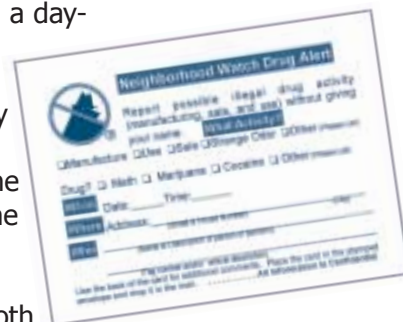
communities. They successfully applied for a three-year grant through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

The first thing the new coalition did was conduct a needs assessment through a focus group consisting of local law enforcement, the district attorney's office, and other members of the community. Focus group results revealed methamphetamines as the number one issue for the community, Niehaus said.

In the spring of 2001, the coalition held a day-long forum, in which approximately 120 people attended. The purpose of the forum was to explain the dangers of both

methamphetamine use and manufacturing.

a postcard they can
send anonymously to
the local drug
task force
detailing possible
illegal drug
activity



Representatives from the state Office of Justice and the environmental department attended, as well as the local district attorney's office.

Next, the coalition met to discuss how its members could help law enforcement get additional information on potential illegal drug activity. From these discussions the idea of the anonymous cards was born.

"We have cards in all the convenience stores and post offices and in the city offices where people go to pay their utility bills," Niehaus said. "We have them in the schools, some of the churches, and even in some of the bars. We also have them in one of the grocery stores."

The cards, printed in both English and Spanish, allow people to report and identify possible illegal activity, such as

manufacturing, use, sale, or a strange odor, which is often associated with the manufacturing of meth. The card also provides space to report when the possible illegal activity occurred, who is involved, where it happened, and the tag number and vehicle description of any cars that might be involved.

The card can then be placed in the accompanying addressed and stamped envelope and dropped in a mailbox. It goes to the 13th



District Drug Task Force, who then investigates the allegation.

Thus far, the community has taken the idea seriously, and except for a few people taking the stamps, no one

has abused the anonymous card concept, Niehaus said.

"The best part is it gives people in the community a sense of power that they can

do something," Niehaus said. "They don't have to make a call that can be traced."

Adults aren't alone in making the card concept work. Local high school students are responsible for replenishing the supplies of cards around the communities.

Meth isn't the only problem being tackled in the Commerce-Picher-Cardin area. Students in the three towns are involved with the state's Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT). In late September 2002, the students went to Oklahoma City to demonstrate against retailers and advertisers who were promoting tobacco products to young people.

"Tobacco is a real problem here," Niehaus said. "Our smoking rate is three times the national average."

The students in SWAT also work with a county-wide adult group the coalition formed, Tobacco Unsafe for Today's Society, or TUTS, on several projects. The kids called all the

restaurants in the area to find out how many were smoke free. In June 2002, they hosted a celebration with the adults for the dozen restaurants out of 45 that were smoke free. About 100 people attended the celebration. Since then, another eight restaurants have committed to becoming smoke free, Niehaus said.

The students and adults have also worked together to get brochures in the local hotels and motels, listing which restaurants in the area are smoke free.

At a summer camp, the students also painted a 16' x 4' mural, hinged in the middle, which they use to carry the message about the dangers of smoking to younger kids in schools around the county. They have even taken it as far as Tulsa, Niehaus said.

The students' work has paid off in that they were invited to have lunch recently with Oklahoma Commissioner of Health, Leslie Beitsch. Dr. Beitsch was presented with a SWAT t-shirt and got to view the brochures and pictures from the students' anti-tobacco activities. The kids also made a certificate for him congratulating him on the stand he's taken against second-hand smoke.

"He was really complimentary on what we've done," Niehaus said. "He said these kids were a new generation of future leaders, making healthy choices."

Acknowledgements:

Tanja Edwards, MHR
Author and Interviewer

Glenda Lewin Hufnagel, PhD
Editor

LaDonna Coy, MHR
Editor

Brenda Powell
Design/Format/Layout

Contact Information:

CSAP's Southwest Center for the
Application of Prevention
Technologies
555 Constitution Avenue
Suite 132
Norman, OK 73072
(800) 853-2572
(405) 325-1454
FAX (405) 325-7092
www.swcapt.org

Success Story:

Nancy Niehaus
Executive Director
Commerce-Picher-Cardin Coalition
PO Box 173
Picher, OK 74360
(918) 673-1003
e-mail: cpc@picher-k12.ok.us

Resources:

Center for Substance Abuse
Prevention
[www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/
csap.html](http://www.samhsa.gov/centers/csap/csap.html)

Decision Support System
www.preventiondss.org

Join Together
www.jointogether.org

Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of
America
www.cadca.org

For this community success story
and others from across the
Southwest region, visit our
website at [http://
www.swcapt.org/products/
success.html](http://www.swcapt.org/products/success.html)